OE FORM 6000, 2/69

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

ERIC REPORT RESUME

ERIC ACC. NO.	P.A.	PUBL. DATE	ISSUE
ED 035 791			
CH ACC. NO. AA 000 494		Mar 70	RIEJUN70

IS DOCUMENT COPYRIGHTED? YES ☐ NO ☒
ERIC REPRODUCTION RELEASE? YES ☐ NO ☒
LEVEL OF AVAILABILITY I ☒ II ☐ III ☐

AUTHOR
Handler, Ellen

TITLE
Teacher-Parent Relations in Preschools.

SOURCE CODE	INSTITUTION (SOURCE)
BBB00816	Illinois Univ., Urbana, Dept. of Sociology
SP. AG. CODE	SPONSORING AGENCY

EDRS PRICE	CONTRACT NO.	GRANT NO.
0.25;0.65		
REPORT NO.		BUREAU NO.

AVAILABILITY

JOURNAL CITATION

DESCRIPTIVE NOTE
11p.; Paper presented at the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association, Minneapolis, Minnesota, March, 1970

DESCRIPTORS
*Parent Teacher Cooperation; *Decision Making; *Preschool Programs; Preschool Teachers; Day Care Programs; Compensatory Education Programs; *Typology

IDENTIFIERS
*Parent Teacher Relations

ABSTRACT
This study investigated the determinants and consequences of teacher-parent relations in the preschool context. Differences in teacher-parent relations appear to depend on the relative power of the two parties. Since teachers always control the main service offered by the institution, i.e. care and/or education of young children, and are always dependent on others for resources, i.e. money the main variant was defined as the degree of parental control over financial resources of the organization and degree of parental dependence on its service. A four-fold typology was developed to demonstrate that teacher power is relatively highest in subsidized day care centers and parent power is relatively highest in private nursery schools. Data for the study came from participant observations and interviews with teachers in 12 preschool programs in a midwestern urban community. Implications for program planning and execution were shown for schools that differed along the relevant dimensions. (Author)

GPO 870-390

AA 000 494

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION
& WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

TEACHER-PARENT RELATIONS IN PRESCHOOLS

Ellen Handler
Sociology Department
University of Illinois
Urbana-Champaign

A paper presented at the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association, March 1970, Minneapolis

ED 035 791

Teacher-Parent Relations in Preschools

Ellen Handler
University of Illinois, Urbana

Until the recent furor over local control of public schools, the subject of teacher-parent relations attracted very little attention. Classic studies in the sociology of education such as those by Parsons(1959), and Becker (1957) and most particularly those by Waller (1932), described some of the main parameters of the subject but failed to recognize its importance. They called attention to the potential for conflict between parents and teachers in their differing expectations of and goals for children. They also implied that teacher-parent relations could be defined in terms of the relative power of the two parties, both of whom desire control over essential decision making in the schools. They did not see the subject as problematic probably because they studied only the public elementary schools. In that setting, they correctly described parents, from the teacher's point of view, as a nuisance rather than as a threat, and showed the various devices by which schools keep parents out of the educational system so that teachers can make decisions and carry out the educational process as they see fit. The authors never conceived of parents as a source of power through which the educational process could be shaped and modified.

These authors seemed to assume that this description was generic to teacher-parent relations in all educational institutions. However, the study on which this paper is based, suggests that the above is, instead, only a specific case, which can be related to structural factors which are characteristic of public elementary schools. The current study of teacher-parent relations, which was carried on in a variety of preschool institutions, offers insight into different patterns of teacher-parent relations, and the structural determinants which give rise to these patterns.

This study aimed at developing a parsimonious rather than a comprehensive typology of teacher-parent relations. The four cases to be described should be regarded as "ideal types" in Weber's sense (Gerth, 1958) since few situations will fit the model in all respects.

These descriptions focus on the decision making process in the schools. However, it should be noted that decision making is, in itself, a complex subject with many parameters. This typology employs only the following crude distinctions. The opposite pole to decision making is defined as obedience to demands originating from the other party. Further, the typology distinguishes between decision making in areas that are central to the educational process, i.e. basic educational goals, such as academic versus artistic-creative emphases, personnel policy, such as qualifications for hiring, promotion, and firing, etc., as against decision making in areas that are peripheral to the educational process, i.e. type of entertainment for special occasions such as Christmas, format of parents' meetings, etc.

The typology also distinguishes the party that initiates the bulk of teacher-parent contacts, not because this factor has intrinsic significance but because this has been shown by George Homans (1950) to be a good indicator of the relative power of the different parties. The party with greater power tends to initiate more contacts with the party of lesser power than vice versa.

This paper is part of a more extensive but, nevertheless, exploratory sociological analysis of preschool education. It frankly represents an inductive approach to research through the method of "constant comparison", which was so ably expounded by Glaser and Strauss in The Discovery of Grounded Theory (1967).

The research method involved intensive study of six preschool institutions in a medium size (about 100,000 population) midwestern community. After the basic pattern emerged, another six institutions were studied more briefly, mainly to test the usefulness of the typology.

As is usually true in case studies of institutions, a variety of methods were used. The two main methods were systematic participant observations and intensive, open-ended but standardized interviews with all 21 teachers in these schools. The study also included interviews with other people connected with the schools, such as board members, and available parents, and study of various documents, such as statements of policy, charters or constitutions of the organizations, lists of rules and regulations, contracts, etc.

In participant observations, all teachers in all six schools were observed repeatedly, for periods of at least two hours each and at different times of the day. A special effort was made to observe during periods of maximum teacher-parent interaction such as at the end of the school day and during parent meetings.

The interviews which were long (1 1/2-2 1/2 hours) and took place only after a positive relationship between teacher and observer had been established through classroom visits, approached the subject from a variety of points of view. Teachers were asked how often they spoke to parents, under what circumstances, and who initiated the contact. They were asked to describe in detail the content of the discussions with parents and to relate incidents where they disagreed with parents and what happened subsequently. They were asked what they saw as their role vis-a-vis

parents, what were their goals in their dealings with parents, and the source of special frustrations and satisfactions in dealing with parents.

The results can be summarized in the following four-fold typology (see Figure 1):

Type I. In the first type of preschool situation, teachers are clearly in charge and parents follow rules. Contact between teachers and parents is minimal and generally initiated by teachers. Virtually all decision making is done by the staff. The content of teacher-parent interaction generally revolves around parent compliance with staff rules. For instance, parents are usually required to make their own transportation arrangements and to pay fines if they are late in picking up their children.

This type is exemplified by the subsidized day care center. Client fees are low and generally depend on the family's ability to pay. Typically, this type of institution is set up to serve the economically deprived and the organization does not depend on client fees for its continued existence. Such facilities are usually in great demand and waiting lists are a common feature.

Type II. This type might most graphically be described as a stand-off. Despite all the rhetoric to the contrary, central decision making remains with the staff but, in contrast to the previous case, parents are not expected to comply with demands. Very few, if any, demands are made on the parents because it has been found that parents do not comply. For instance, regarding transportation for children, whereas in the previous case parents were expected to make their own arrangements, in this type of school transportation is usually provided or the children do not come.

In this situation, decision making is a very sensitive issue. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish the blueprint from reality. For

instance, parents are officially encouraged to play a central role in the decision making process. In part to facilitate parent participation, teachers are required to make home visits, since few parents come to the school for any reason, even when money payment is offered as an inducement to attend meetings. In practice, these home visits generally turn out to be very brief and purely social affairs, unrelated to school events or policies.

The organizational blueprint would show the existence of advisory groups and other official channels through which parents participate in central decision making for the schools. In fact, these meetings are very sparsely attended and the agenda tends to consist of peripheral issues, such as, whether the parents prefer a panel of speakers or a single speaker for a future parents' meeting.

Furthermore, even though parents are officially encouraged to initiate contact with staff and to take part in a number of school activities, most of the teacher-parent interactions are initiated by the staff and parent participation is unofficially discouraged in a variety of ways.

One example of this type is compensatory education programs like Head Start. These are usually part day programs, completely supported by public funds. All preschoolers of eligible families, i.e. those whose income falls below a specified maximum, are encouraged to attend.

Type III. This type comes closest to a relationship between equals or a partnership. Interaction between teachers and parents tends to be informal and lively, initiated about equally by either party, and concerned with virtually any and all aspects of the school. Both parties reserve

the right to accept or reject the suggestions made by the other. Both parties make demands on the other, some of which are met, whereas others are rejected. If disagreements between the two parties become too serious, they tend to terminate the relationship by removing the child from the school.

One example of this type is the small, proprietary day care center, especially under circumstances where the demand for such facilities more or less equals the supply. These centers are supported by client fees and offer an all day service to children of middle class working parents.

Type IV. Type IV is the polar opposite to Type I. Here parents play a more important role in decision making than teachers. The amount of teacher-parent contact varies with the individual but it is frequently extensive and primarily parent initiated. Parents play a dominant role at formal meetings where central policy questions are discussed. In some of these schools, teachers see their role frankly as carrying out policy directives formulated by parents. Some of these teachers find it difficult to preserve a medium of professional autonomy even though they tend to be highly trained. Teachers in these situations often find it necessary to institute a variety of mechanisms to protect themselves against parental interference. They are frequently unable to obtain parental compliance with their requests and also find it equally difficult to reject demands made by parents. In some of these schools parents also formulate and carry out personnel policies so that teachers are dependent on their clients for their employment, promotions, salaries, etc.

The most extreme example of this type is the cooperative nursery school, although many part-time private nursery schools share some of

these characteristics. These schools are supported by client fees and offer an educational or other supplementary service to middle class children whose mothers are typically full-time homemakers.

In keeping with the original framework of this paper, it now becomes necessary to translate these types into the language of social power. The four types can be arranged in the following simple two by two matrix:

Figure 1. Typology of Teacher-Parent Relations

	Supported by outside funds	Supported by client fees
Long Day	Type I. Subsidized Day Care Center	Type III. Private Day Care Center
Short Day	Type II. Compensatory Education (Head Start)	Type IV. Private Nursery Schools (Cooperatives)

Two major dimensions emerge. Type I. and II. differ from Types III. and IV. in the source of financial support, whereas Type I. and III. differ from Types II. and IV. in the length of the school day. Now, power in the sense of one party imposing his will on another depends on the first party's ability to control resources needed by the other. Conversely, it relates to the dependence of the second party on resources controlled by the first. In Types III. and IV. parents provide the financial base, which is essential for the life of these organizations. Types I. and II. have other sources of funding. Obtaining and keeping clients is needed for the legitimation of Types I. and II. organizations

but they do not feel the same pinch as do Type III. and IV. institutions when a client is dissatisfied and leaves.

The length of day dimension, which differentiates Types I. nd III. from Types II. a and IV. is more subtle. In general, children are enrolled in day care centers because mothers want to or have to work. Consequently, mothers literally depend on this service to enable them to fulfill other important role obligations. In contrast, children are sent to part day schools because mothers desire a non-essential service for their children or because they would like to have a few hours of freedom for themselves. The degree of dependence on the service is distinctly different in the part-day and the full-day institutions.

When these two dimensions are combined, it becomes apparent that parent power is greatest in Type IV. and least in Type I. schools. Conversely, the other party to the relationship, the teachers, have relatively most power in Type I. and least in Type IV. schools.

The situation in the public elementary schools is an extreme case of Type I. These schools are publicly funded and because of compulsory attendance laws, parents have no choice but to send their children to school. In addition, most parents have no choice of school because few have access to non-public schools and children are assigned to a specific school by an authoritative government agency. Furthermore, much of the decision making for the public schools is carried out in the depths of a huge, distance bureaucracy, which, in effect, shields the decision makers from visibility and accessibility to client groups. The importance of local control is that it modifies this last factor and thus changes the balance of power. It is not difficult to imagine the upheaval that might ensue if, for instance, educational funds were not distributed to

the schools, but instead, as was suggested by Milton Friedman, to individual families to be used at the institution of their choice(1970).

The purpose of this paper was not to present a comprehensive analysis of teacher-parent relations but rather to direct attention to structural factors affecting this aspect of our schools in the hope that further research will help us to understand the determinants of teacher-parent relations and their implications for educational policy and process.

References

Becker, H. S. The teacher in the authority system of the public school, in Education and the Social Order, Mercer, B. E. and Carr, E. R. (eds.) New York: Rinehart & Co., 1957.

Friedmanism, n. doctrine of most audacious U. S. economist, especially, theory only money matters, New York Times Magazine, Jan. 25, 1970, p. 82.

Gerth, H. H. & Mills, C. W. From Max Weber: Essays in sociology. New York: Oxford University Press, 1958, pp. 59-60.

Glaser, B. G. & Strauss, A. L. The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1967.

Homans, G. C. The human group. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950, p. 145.

Parsons, T. The school class as a social system: Some of its functions in American society. Harvard Educational Review, 29, Fall, 1959.

Waller, E. The sociology of teaching. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965. (First edition published in 1932.)